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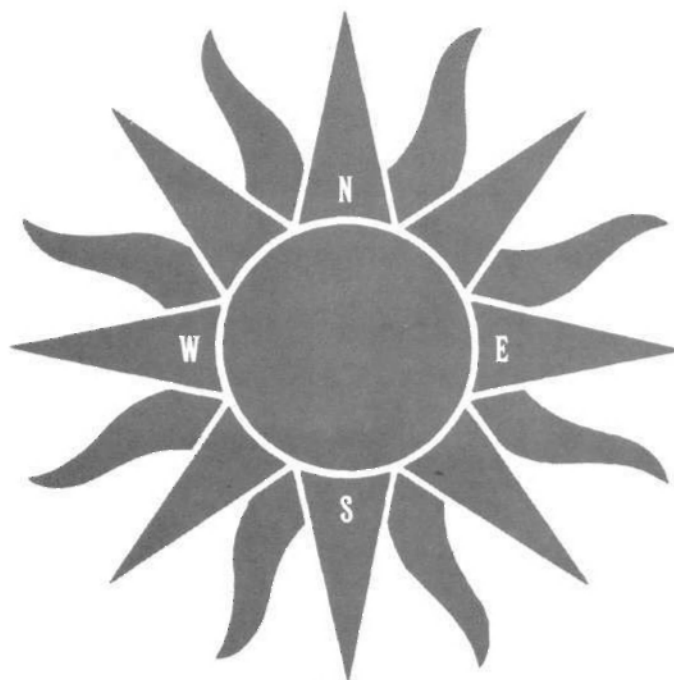
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## OUR MOVE TO CARACAS

By Doris M. Grominger

Last June, as we sat waiting for the plane that would take Howard to the Principals' Meeting, one of the girls commented on the change in the terminal since our arrival in Venezuela. Far greater is the change in all of us. Now we were relaxed, chatting, and enjoying our coffee and toast.

What a contrast to the way I had felt almost three years before, when we arrived in this same airport with our four children, ranging in age from nineteen years to sixteen months. The house in the States was sold, the furniture and car were on their way, and we were tired from the months of preparation. The visas, police certificates, inoculations, dental work, and shopping for a year's supply of clothing were behind us. We were excited over the newness, but a little apprehensive about the unknown that lay ahead.

Howard, who had been working in Caracas for two months before our arrival, had lined up a temporary apartment and a house into which we could move when our furniture arrived. We were glad when we left that apartment, with the doleful picture over the bed of a

woman with a dagger in her heart. The house to which we moved is new and quite modern: a split level with four levels. The walls are made of hollow red bricks and the roof is of red tile—all of which makes for a wonderfully heatproof construction. It never gets cold enough for heating, though we are glad to have our wool bathrobes in the winter months.

As in the States, we were hardly in before a milkman came to the door wanting to know if he could deliver not only pasteurized milk, but bread and daily newspapers too. Shopping for food here has not proved to be any great difficulty. A trip to the well-stocked supermarket was almost as easy as shopping at home. I soon found that some items which I was accustomed to were missing, but such things as beef, pork, veal, chicken, bananas and tomatoes are plentiful all year round. Shopping for clothing and household items is a much more difficult matter. Most Americans will have a hard time finding shoes or dresses that fit properly. Linens and some other household items are considerably more expensive than in the States.

The Gromingers visit Venezuelan Congress Building.

We soon learned that the maid was necessary for more than the daily washing of the white terrazzo floors. She was a great help to us as a Spanish teacher, and she also became the go-between with many door-to-door salesmen and collectors who come daily. All of our bills, with the exception of the electric bill, are collected personally. This is really no problem. It was in writing the checks that I sometimes ran into trouble. For one not familiar with Spanish numbers, spelling them out can be difficult. All too soon the day came when a check was returned. The amount was written out improperly. After that, until I learned all of my numbers, I carried a card in my checkbook with a translation of the numbers. Reconciling the bank statement can also be somewhat of a problem as the bank does not return the cancelled checks.

Several days after our arrival, Judy, a sophomore, and Nancy, a freshman, started high school in Colegio Americano, a Presbyterian Mission School, accredited in the States. They soon learned that although American methods were used, it was not in all senses an American

school. The student body is quite international; many students, in addition to speaking English and Spanish, speak another foreign language or two. Half of the school, the Liceo, is taught in Spanish, and in accordance with the Venezuelan system a student specializes in Sciences or Humanities for five years so that he may be accepted in the Venezuelan universities. Our girls, both of whom expect to complete their education in the States, have been studying a standard four-year high school course in English, though Spanish is compulsory for all students. Nancy had been in an experimental language program while we were in the States and had studied Spanish from the fourth grade on. This gave her confidence from the beginning. Judy, with her love of conversation, advanced rapidly in the language, even though she had never previously studied Spanish.

Our son, Skip, who had taken a year off from college to spend with us in Venezuela, immediately began to study at the Centro Venezolano Americano. The CVA is a cultural organization, which offers English courses to Spanish speakers and Spanish courses to English

speaking people. The CVA also has lectures, movies, performing artists and social get-togethers, most of which are free.

There are many other organizations, for children as well as adults, which offer recreational facilities and opportunities for study and community service. Our girls joined the Tri-Hi-Y program, part of which is the performance of community service. While I was advisor for Judy and Nancy's Tri-Hi-Y group, the girls chose as their project helping the children of the Colegio Americano sister school in Guatire, about an hour's ride from Caracas. When we visited the Colegio Americano in Guatire we had the inspiring experience of seeing mission work in action. The children there are poor and the facilities far from adequate, yet it would be hard to find a happier group. The director of the school is a vibrant man with contagious enthusiasm. It was from his wife that I received my first abrazo, or embrace, the customary way of greeting friends.

The people of Venezuela are warm, gay, and party-loving. Above all, they are a family-loving people. One of the most moving recollections I have of the Vene-

zuelan people is of the time when President Kennedy was assassinated. His visit to Venezuela had meant so much to them and they truly loved him. Like Americans everywhere, we were in a state of shock over the unbelievable death of this vibrant man. Many Venezuelans took the time to tell us how distressed they were by the tragedy. For three days the country went into official mourning. Nothing but conservative music was played on the radio, the ever-present bell of the ice cream man was noticeably silent, and everywhere many, many people wore black. No greater respect could have been shown to any man.

Caracas, being the capital of Venezuela, is a very cosmopolitan and international city. Social groups and service organizations tend to be a blend of Venezuelans and Europeans as well as many Americans. The city itself is an old city, now looking forward to its 400th Anniversary, and still one of the fastest growing cities in the world. It is a city of contrasts. Along with the stately Capital building, with its inside gardens, and the Miraflores Palace, site of the executive offices, one can see the new "Twin Towers" which house more government

*Opposite:* Grominger children attend Colegio Americano, a cosmopolitan school employing U.S. teaching methods in typical Spanish building.

*Above:* A popular place to stop for a hamburger is this supermarket restaurant.

*Right:* Family leaves parking area under Twin Towers, a fine example of modern Caracas architecture, which are part of new Centro Bolívar government office buildings.

offices and stand out so clearly in the city's skyline. The Circulo Militar with its monuments and parade ground is a beautiful tribute to the new Caracas.

For the first year the strangeness and separation from loved ones made the adjustment hard, but now that I get along in Spanish, even if I'm still embarrassed by my poor grammar, the fears of the beginning are gone. We are here, and happy to remain here for the foreseeable future, because Howard wanted this assignment. He had decided after working in South America for many years on short trips that he could make a better contribution—and in turn receive more personal satisfaction from his work—by transferring here. Fortunately, it has worked out well for all of us. He continues to feel that in his daily contact with the Venezuelans on the DPH&S staff and in the clients' offices he is getting something out of life that could not be attained by working in an office in the United States.

Since moving to Caracas we have returned to the States twice. When we arrived in New York we were struck by the orderliness—motorists stopped at traffic lights and stayed sedately in line. The streets looked so

clean—there was no litter. The shops were dazzling. But, how hurried everyone seemed, particularly in the restaurants. Somehow, I missed the rather late, leisurely meals we had enjoyed in the uncrowded restaurants of Caracas. It was wonderful to see our old friends and family, but we were struck by how preoccupied everyone seemed with his own small world. Some wondered how we got along without all of the conveniences which they seemed to feel made life more liveable.

On our second visit, Skip went back to Venezuela after spending a few weeks with us in the States, and by the time our leave was over, we all just wanted to get home to Caracas. Caracas is home to us now. It is here that we have watched our baby grow into a taller and huskier child than her brother and sisters were at four. This year Judy graduated from high school and next year Nancy will graduate. They agree with us that when they go back to the States to school, they will go back with horizons that have been enriched by the experience of having lived abroad.

